

# A Toy Tragedy

*A Story For Children*

By F. Anstey

This story is mostly about dolls, and I am afraid that all boys, and a good many girls who have tried hard to forget that they ever had dolls, will not care about hearing it. Still, as I have been very careful to warn them at the very beginning, they must not blame me if they read on and find that it does not interest them.

It was after dark, and the criss-cross shadows of the high wire-fender were starting in and out on the walls and ceiling of Winifred's nursery in the flickering firelight, and Winifred's last new doll Ethelinda was sitting on the top of a chest of drawers, leaning back languidly against the wall.

Ethelinda was a particularly handsome doll; she had soft thick golden hair, arranged in the latest fashion, full blue eyes, with rather more expression in them than dolls' eyes generally have, a rose-leaf complexion, the least little haughty curl on her red lips, and a costume that came direct from Paris.

She ought to have been happy with all these advantages, and yet she was plainly dissatisfied; she looked disgustingly at all around her, at the coloured pictures from the illustrated papers on the walls, the staring red dolls' house, the big Noah's ark on the shelf, and the dingy dappled rocking-horse in the corner—she despised them all.

'I do wish I was back in Regent Street again,' she sighed aloud.

There was another doll sitting quite close to her, but Ethelinda had not made the remark to him, as he did not seem at all the sort of person to be encouraged.

He was certainly odd-looking: his head was a little too big for his body, and his body was very much too big for his legs; he had fuzzy white hair, and a face which was rather like Punch's — only with all the fun taken out of it.

When anyone pinched him in the chest hard, he squeaked and shut his eyes, as if it hurt him—and very likely it did. He wore a tawdry jester's dress of red and blue, and once he had even carried a cymbal in each hand and clapped them together every time they made him squeak; but he had always disliked being obliged to make so much noise, for he was of a quiet and retiring nature, and so he had got rid of his unmusical instruments as soon as he could.

Still, even without the cymbals, his appearance was hardly respectable, and Ethelinda was a little annoyed to find him so near her, though he never guessed her feelings, which was fortunate for him, for he had fallen in love with her.

Since he first entered the nursery he had had a good deal of knocking about, but his life there had begun to seem easier to put up with from the moment she formed part of it.

He had never dared to speak to her before, she had never given him the chance; and besides, it was quite enough for him to look at her; but now he thought she meant to be friendly and begin a conversation.

'Are you very dull here then?' he asked rather nervously.

Ethelinda stared at first; no one had introduced him, and she felt very much inclined to take no notice; however, she thought after her long silence that it might amuse her to talk to somebody, even if it was only a shabby common creature like this jester.

So she said, 'Dull! You were never in Regent Street, or you wouldn't ask such a question.'

'I came from the Lowther Arcade,' he said.

'Oh, really?' drawled Ethelinda; 'then, of course, this would be quite a pleasant change for you.'

'I don't know,' he said; 'I liked the Arcade. It was so lively; a little noisy perhaps—too much top spinning, and pop-gunning, and mouth-organ playing all round one—but very cheerful. Yes, I liked the Arcade.'

'Very mixed the society there, isn't it?' she asked; 'aren't you expected to know penny things?'

'Well, there *were* a good many penny things there, he owned, 'and very amusing they were. There was a wooden bird there that used to duck his head and wag his tail when they swung a weight underneath—he would have made you laugh so!'

'I hope,' said Ethelinda freezingly, 'I should never so far forget myself as to laugh under any circumstances—and certainly not at a penny thing!'

'I wonder how much he cost?' she thought; 'not very much, I can see from his manner. But perhaps I can get him to tell me. Do you remember,' she asked aloud, 'what was the—ah—the premium they asked for introducing you here—did you happen to catch the amount?'

'Do you mean my price?' he said; 'oh, eleven-pence three farthings—it was on the ticket.'

'What a vulgar creature!' thought Ethelinda; 'I shall really have to drop him.'

'Dear me,' she said, 'that sounds very reasonable, very moderate indeed; but perhaps you were "reduced"?' for she thought he would be more bearable if he had cost a little more once.

'I don't think so,' he said; 'that's the fair selling price.'

'Well, that's very curious,' said she, 'because the young man at Regent Street (a most charming person, by the way) positively wouldn't part with me under thirty-five shillings, and he said so many delightful things about me that I feel quite sorry for him sometimes, when I think boxy he must be missing me. But then, very likely he's saying the same thing about some other doll now!'

'I suppose he is,' said the jester (he had seen something of toy-selling in his time); 'it's his business, you know.'

'I don't see how you can possibly tell,' said Ethelinda, who had not expected him to agree with her; 'the Lowther Arcade is not Regent Street.'

The jester did not care to dispute this. 'And were you very happy at Regent Street?' he asked.

'Happy?' she repeated. 'Well, I don't know; at least, one was not bored there. I was in the best set, you see, the two-guinea one, and they were always getting up something to amuse us in the window—a review, or a sham fight, or a garden-party, or something. Last winter they gave us a fancy-dress ball—I went as Mary Stuart, and was very much admired. But here—' and she finished the sentence with a disdainful little shrug.

'I don't think you'll find it so very bad here, when you get a little more used to it,' he said; 'our mistress—'

'Pray don't use that very unpleasant word,' she interrupted sharply. 'Did you never hear of "dolls' rights"?' *We* call these people "hostesses."

'Well, our hostess, then—Winifred, she's not unkind. She doesn't care much about me, and that cousin of hers, Master Archie, gives me a bad time of it when I come in his way, but really she's very polite and attentive to you.'

'Polite and attentive!' sneered Ethelinda (and if you have never seen a doll sneer, you can have no idea how alarming it is). 'I don't call it an attention to be treated like a baby by a little chit of

a girl who can't dress herself properly yet—no style, no elegance, and actually a pinafore in the mornings!

This is the way some of these costly lady dolls talk about their benefactresses when the gas is out and they think no one overhears them. I don't know whether the plain old-fashioned ones, who are not so carefully treated, but often more tenderly loved, are as bad; but it is impossible to say—dolls are exceedingly artful, and there are persons, quite clever in other things, who will tell you honestly that they do not understand them in the least.

'Then the society here,' Ethelinda went on, without much consideration for the other's feelings—perhaps she thought he was too cheap to have any—'it's really something too dreadful for words. Why, those people in the poky little house over there, with only four rooms and a front door they can't open, have never had the decency to call upon me. Not that I should take any notice, of course, if they did, but it just shows what they are. And the other day I actually overheard one frightful creature in a print dress, with nothing on her head but a great tin-tack, ask another horror "which she liked best—*make-believe tea or orange-juice!*"',

'Well, *I* prefer make-believe tea myself,' said the jester, 'because, you see, I can't get the orange-juice down, and so it's rather bad for the dress and complexion.'

'Possibly,' she said scornfully. 'I'm thankful to say I've not been called upon to try it myself—even Miss Winifred knows better than that. But, anyhow, it's horribly insipid here, and I suppose it will be like this always now. I did hope once that when I went out into the world I should be a heroine and have a romance of my own.'

'What is a romance?' he asked.

'I thought you wouldn't understand me,' she said; 'a romance is—well, there's champagne in it, and cigarettes, to begin with.'

'But what is champagne?' he interrupted.

'Something you drink,' she said; 'what else could it be?'

'I see,' he said; 'a sort of orange-juice.'

'Orange-juice!' Ethelinda cried contemptuously; 'it's not in the least like orange-juice; it's—' (she didn't know what it was made of herself, but there was no use in telling him so) 'I couldn't make you understand without too much trouble, you really are so very ignorant, but there's a good deal of it in romances. And dukes, and guardsmen, and being very beautiful and deliciously miserable, till just before the end—that's a romance! My milliner used to have it read out to her while she was dressing me for that ball I told you about.'

'Do you mind telling me what a heroine is?' he asked. 'I know I'm very stupid.'

'A heroine? oh, any doll can be a heroine. I felt all the time the heroines were all just like me. They were either very good or very wicked, and I'm sure I could be the one or the other if I got the chance. I think it would be more amusing, perhaps, to be a little wicked, but then it's not quite so easy, you know.'

'I should think it would be more uncomfortable' he suggested.

'Ah, but then you see you haven't any sentiment about you,' she said disparagingly.

'No,' he admitted, 'I'm afraid I haven't. I suppose they couldn't put it in for elevenpence three farthings.'

'I should think not,' Ethelinda observed, 'it's very *expensive*.' And then, after a short silence, she said more confidentially, 'you were talking of Master Archie just now. I rather like that boy, do you know. I believe I could make something of him if he would only let me.'

'He's a mischievous boy,' said the jester, 'and ill-natured too.'

‘Yes, *isn't* he?’ she agreed admiringly; ‘I like him for that. I fancy a duke or a guardsman must be something like him; they all had just his wicked black eyes and long restless fingers. It wouldn't be quite so dull if he would notice me a little; but he never will!’

‘He's going back to school next week,’ the jester said rather cheerfully.

‘So soon!’ sighed Ethelinda. ‘There's hardly time for him to make a real heroine of me before that. How I wish he would! I shouldn't care how he did it, or what came of it. I'm sure I should enjoy it, and it would give me something to think about all my life.’

‘Say that again, my dainty little lady; say it again!’ cried a harsh, jeering voice from beside them, ‘and, if you really mean it, perhaps the old Sausage-Glutton can manage it for you. He's done more wonderful things than that in his time, I can tell you.’

The voice came from an old German clock which stood on the mantelpiece, or rather, from a strange painted wooden figure which was part of it—an ugly old man, who sat on the top with a plate of sausages on his knees, amid a fork in one hand. Every minute he slowly forked up a sausage from the plate to his mouth, and swallowed it suddenly, while his lower jaw wagged, and his narrow eyes rolled as it went down in a truly horrible manner.

The children had long since given him the name of ‘Sausage-Glutton,’ which he richly deserved. He was a sort of magician in his way, having so much clockwork in his inside, and he was spiteful and malicious, owing to the quantity of wooden sausages he bolted, which would have ruined anyone's digestion and temper.

‘Good gracious!’ cried Ethelinda, with a start, who is that person?’

‘Somebody who can be a good kind friend to you, pretty lady, if you only give him leave. So you want some excitement here, do you? You want to be wicked, and interesting, and unfortunate, and all the rest of it, eh? And you'd like young Archibald (a nice boy that, by the way), you'd like him to give you a little romance? Well, then, he shall, and to-morrow too, hot and strong, if you like to say the word.’

Ethelinda was too much fluttered to speak at first, and she was a little afraid of the old man, too, for he leered all round in such an odd way, and ate so fast and jerkily.

‘Don't—oh, *please* don't!’ cried a little squeaky voice above him. It came from a queer little angular doll, with gold-paper wings, a spangled muslin dress, and a wand with a tinsel star at the end of it, who was fastened up on the wall above a picture. ‘You won't like it—you won't, really!’

‘Don't trust him,’ whispered the jester; ‘he's a bad old man; he ruined a very promising young dancing nigger only the other day, unhinged him so that he will never hook on anymore.’

‘Ha, ha!’ laughed the Sausage-Glutton, as he disposed of another sausage, ‘that old fellow in the peculiar coat is jealous, you know; he can't make a heroine of you, and so he doesn't want anyone else to. Who cares what he says? And as for our little wooden friend up above, well, I should hope a dainty duchess like you is not going to let herself be dictated to by a low jointed creature, who sets up for a fairy when she knows her sisters dance round white hats every Derby Day.’

‘They're not sisters; they're second cousins,’ squeaked the poor Dutch doll, very much hurt, ‘and they don't mean any harm by it; it's only their high spirits. And whatever you say, *I'm* a fairy. I had a Christmas-tree of my own once; but I had to leave it, it was so expensive to keep up. Now, you take my advice, my dear, do,’ she added to Ethelinda, ‘don't you listen to him. He'd give all his sausages to see you in trouble, he would; but he can't do anything unless you give him leave.’

But of course it would have been a little too absurd if Ethelinda had taken advice from a flat-headed twopenny doll and a flabby jester from the Lowther Arcade. 'My good creatures,' she said to them, 'you mean well, no doubt, but pray leave this gentleman and me to settle our own affairs. Can you really get Master Archie to take some notice of me, sir?' she said to the figure on the clock.

'I can, my loveliest,' he said.

'And will it be exciting,' she asked, 'and romantic, and—and just the least bit *wicked* too?'

'You shall be the very wickedest heroine in any nursery in the world,' he replied. 'Oh, dear me, how you *will* enjoy yourself!'

'Then I accept,' said Ethelinda; 'I put myself quite in your hands—I leave everything to you.'

'That's right!' cried the Sausage-Glutton, 'that's a brave little beauty. It's a bargain, then? Tomorrow afternoon the fun will begin, and then—my springs and wheels—what a time you will have of it! He, he! You look out for Archibald!'

And then he trembled all over as the clock struck twelve, and went on eating his sausages without another word, while Ethelinda gave herself up to delightful anticipations of the wonderful adventures that were actually about to happen to her at last.

But the jester felt very uneasy about it all; he felt so sure that the old Sausage-Glutton's amiability had some trickery underneath it.

'You are a fairy, aren't you?' he said to the Dutch doll in a whisper; 'can't you do anything to help her?'

'No,' she said sulkily; 'and if I could, I wouldn't. She has chosen to put herself in his power, and whatever comes of it will serve her right. I don't know what he means to do, and I can't stop him. Still, if I can't help her, I can help you; and you may want it, because he is sure to be angry with you for trying to warn her.'

'But I never gave him leave to meddle with me,' said the jester.

'Have you got sawdust or bran inside you, or what?' asked the fairy.

'Neither,' he said; 'only the bellows I squeak with, and wire. But why?'

'I was afraid so. It's only the dolls with sawdust or bran inside them that he can't do whatever he likes with without their consent. He can do anything he chooses with you; but he shan't hurt you this time, if you only take care—for I'll grant you the very next thing you wish. Only *do* be careful now about wishing; don't be in a hurry and waste the wish. Wait till things are at their very worst.'

'Thank you very much,' he said; 'I don't mind for myself so much, but I should like to prevent any harm from coming to her. I'll remember.'

Then he bent towards Ethelinda and whispered:

'You didn't believe what the old man on the clock told you about me, did you? I'm not jealous—I'm only a poor jester, and you're a great lady. But you'll let me sit by you, and you'll talk to me sometimes in the evenings as you did to-night, won't you?'

But Ethelinda, though she heard him plainly, pretended to be fast asleep—it was of no consequence to her whether he was jealous or not.

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Winifred was sitting the next afternoon alone in her nursery, trying to play. She was a dear little girl about nine years old, with long, soft, brown hair, a straight little nose, and brown eyes which

just then had a wistful, dissatisfied look in them—for the fact was that, for some reason or other, she could not get on with her dolls at all.

The jester was not good-looking enough for her; they had put his eyes in so carelessly, and his face had such a 'queer' look, and he was altogether a limp, unmanageable person. She always said to herself that she liked him 'for the sake of the giver,' poor clumsy, good-hearted Martha, the housemaid, who had left in disgrace, and presented him as her parting gift; but one might as well not be cared for at all as be liked in that roundabout way.

And Ethelinda, beautiful and fashionable as she was, was not friendly, and Winifred never could get intimate with her; she felt afraid to treat her as a small child younger than herself, it seemed almost a liberty to nurse her, for Ethelinda seemed to be quite grown up and to know far more than she did herself.

She sat there looking at Ethelinda, and Ethelinda stared back at her in a cold, distant way, as if she half remembered meeting her somewhere before. There was a fixed smile on her vermilion lips which seemed false and even a little contemptuous to poor lonely little Winifred, who thought it was hard that her own doll should despise her.

The jester's smile was amiable enough, though it was rather meaningless, but then no one cared about him or how he smiled, as he lay unnoticed on his back in the corner.

You would not have guessed it from their faces, but both dolls were really very much excited; each was thinking about the Sausage-Glutton and his vague promises, and wondering if, and how, those promises were to be carried out.

The wooden magician himself was bolting his sausage a minute on the top of the clock just as usual, only the jester fancied his cunning eyes rolled round at them with a peculiar leer as a cheerful whistle was heard on the stairs outside.

A moment afterwards a lively brown-faced boy in sailor dress put his head in at the door. 'Hullo, Winnie,' he said, 'are you all alone?'

'Nurse has gone downstairs,' said Winnie, plaintively; 'I've got the dolls, but it's dull here somehow. Can't you come and help me to play, Archie?'

Archie had been skating all the morning, and could not settle down just then to any of his favourite books, so he had come up to see Winnie with the idea of finding something to amuse him there—for though he was a boy, he did unbend at times, so far as to help her in her games, out of which he managed to get a good deal of amusement in his own peculiar way.

But of course he had to make a favour of it, and must not let Winifred see that it was anything but a sacrifice for him to consent.

'I've got other things to do,' he said; 'and you know you always make a fuss when I do play with you. Look at last time!'

'Ah, but then you played at being a slave-driver, Archie, and you made me sell you my old black Dinah for a slave, and then you tied her up and whipped her. I didn't like *that* game! But if you'll stay this time, I won't mind what else you do!'

For Archie had a way of making the dolls go through exciting adventures, at which Winifred assisted with a fearful wonder that had a fascination about it.

'Girls don't know how to play with dolls, and that's a fact,' said Archie. 'I could get more fun out of that dolls' house than a dozen girls could' (he would have set fire to it); 'but I tell you what: if you'll let me do exactly what I like, and don't go interfering, except when I tell you to, perhaps I will stay a little while—not long, you know.'

'I promise,' said Winifred, 'if you won't break anything. I'll do just what you tell me.'

'Very well then, here goes; let's see who you've got. I say, who's this in the swell dress?'

He was pointing to Ethelinda, whose brain began to tingle at once with a delicious excitement. 'He has noticed me at last,' she thought; 'I wonder if I could make him fall desperately in love with me!' and she turned her big blue eyes full upon him. 'Ah, if I could only speak—but perhaps I shall presently. I'm quite sure the romance is going to begin!'

'That's Ethelinda, Archie—isn't she pretty?'

'I've seen them uglier,' he said; 'she's like that Eve de Something we saw at Drury Lane—we'll have her, and there's that chap in the fool's dress, we may want him. Now we're ready.'

'What are you going to do with them, Archie?'

'You leave that to me. I've an idea, something much better than your silly tea-parties.'

'Why doesn't he tell that child to go?' thought Ethelinda, 'we don't want *her*!'

'Now listen, Winifred,' said Archie: 'this is the game. You're a beautiful queen (only do sit up and take that finger out of your mouth—queens don't do that). Well, and I'm the king, and this is your maid of honour, the beautiful Lady Ethelinda, see?'

'Go on, Archie; I see,' cried Winifred; 'and I like it so far.'

'I think I ought to have been the queen!' said Ethelinda to herself.

'Well, now,' said the boy, 'I'll tell you something. This maid of honour of yours doesn't like you (don't say she does, now; I'm telling this, and I know). You watch her carefully. Can't you see a sort of look in her face as if she didn't think much of you?'

'How clever he is,' thought Ethelinda; 'he knows exactly how I feel!'

'Do you really think it's that, Archie?' said Winifred; 'it's just what I was afraid of before you came in.'

'That's it. Look out for a kind of glare in her eye when I pay you any attention. (How does Your Majesty do? Well, I hope.) There, didn't you see it? Well, that's jealousy, that is. She hates you like anything!'

'I'm sure she doesn't, then,' protested Winifred.

'Oh, well, if you know better than I do, you can finish it for yourself. I'm going.'

'No, no; do stay. I like it. I'll be good after this!'

'Don't you interrupt again, then. Now the real truth is that she'd like to be queen instead of you; she's ambitious, you know—that's what's the matter with her. And so she's got it into her head that if you were only out of the way, I should ask *her* to be the next queen!'

Winifred could not say a word, she was so overcome by the idea of her doll's unkindness; and Archie took Ethelinda by the waist and brought her near her royal mistress as he said: 'Now you'll see how artful she is; she's coming to ask you if she may go out. Listen. "Please, Your Gracious Majesty, may I go out for a little while?"'

'This is even better than if I spoke myself,' Ethelinda thought; 'he can talk for me, and I do believe I'm going to be quite wicked presently.'

'Am I to speak to her, Archie?' Winifred asked, feeling a little nervous.

'Of course you are. Go on; don't be silly; give her leave.'

'Certainly, Ethelinda, if you wish it,' replied Winifred, with a happy recollection of her mother's manner on somewhat similar occasions, 'but I should like you to be in to prayers.'

'A maid of honour isn't the same as a housemaid, you know,' said Archie; 'but never mind—she's off. *You* don't see where she goes, of course.'

'Yes I do,' said Winifred.

Ah, but not in the game; nobody does. She goes to the apothecary's—here's the apothecary.' And he caught hold of the jester, who thought helplessly, '*I'm* being brought into it now; I wish he'd let me alone—I don't like it!' 'Well, so she says, " Oh, if you please, Mr. Apothecary, I

want some arsenic to kill the royal blackbeetles with; not much—a pound or two will be plenty.” So he takes down a jar’ (here Archie got up and fetched a big bottle of citrate of magnesia from a cupboard), ‘and he weighs it out, and wraps it up, and gives it to her. And he says, “You’ll mind and be very careful with it, my lady. The dose is one pinch in a teaspoonful of treacle to each blackbeetle, the last thing at night; but it oughtn’t to be left about in places.” And so Lady Ethelinda takes it home and hides it.’

‘I’ve bought some poison now,’ thought Ethelinda, immensely delighted, ‘I *am* a wicked doll! How convenient it is to have it all done for one like this! I do hope he’s going to make me give Winifred some of that stuff, to get her out of the way, and have the romance all to our two selves.’

‘Now you and I,’ Archie continued, ‘haven’t the least idea of all this. But one day, the Court jester (‘I was an apothecary just now,’ thought the jester; ‘it’s really very confusing!’)—the Court jester comes up, looking very grave, and sneaks of her. The reason of that is that he’s angry with her because she never will have anything to do with him, and he says that he’s seen her folding up a powder in paper and writing on it, and he thought I ought to be told about it.’ (‘This is awful,’ thought the jester. ‘What will Ethelinda think of me for telling tales? and what has come to Ethelinda? It’s all that miserable Sausage-Glutton’s doing—and I can’t help myself!’)

‘Well, I’m very much surprised of course,’ said Archie; ‘any king would be—but I wait, and one day, when she has gone out for a holiday, the jester and I go to her desk and break it open.’

‘Oh, Archie,’ objected the poor little Queen in despair, ‘isn’t that rather *mean* of you?’

‘Now look here, Winnie, I can’t have this sort of thing every minute. For a gentleman, it might be rather mean, perhaps, but then I’m a king, and I’ve got a right to do it, and it’s all for your sake, too—so you can’t say anything. Besides, it’s the jester does it; I only look on. Well, and by-and-by,’ said Archie, as he scribbled something laboriously on a piece of paper, ‘by-and-by he finds *this!*’

And with imposing gravity he handed Winifred a folded paper, on which she read with real terror and grief the alarming words—‘*Poisin for the Quene!*’

‘There, what do you think of that?’ he asked triumphantly; ‘looks bad, doesn’t it?’

‘Perhaps,’ suggested the Queen feebly, ‘perhaps it was only in fun?’

‘Fun—there’s not much fun about her! Now the guard’ (here he used the bewildered jester once more) arrests her. Do you want to ask the prisoner any questions?—you can if you like.’

‘You—you didn’t mean to poison me really, did you, Ethelinda dear?’ said Winifred, who was taking it all very seriously, as she took most things. ‘Archie, do make her say something!’

‘Why can’t you answer when the Queen asks you a question, eh?’ demanded Archie. ‘No, she won’t say a word; she’ll only grin at you; you see she’s quite hardened. There’s only one thing that would make her confess,’ he added cautiously, aware that he was on rather delicate ground, ‘and that’s the torture. I could make a beautiful rack, Winnie, if you didn’t mind?’

‘Whatever she’s done,’ said the Queen, firmly, ‘I’m not going to have her tortured! And I believe she’s sorry inside and wants me to forgive her!’

‘Then why doesn’t she say so?’ said Archie. ‘No, no, Winnie. Look here, this is a serious thing, you know; it won’t do to pass it over; it’s high treason, and she’ll have to be tried.’

‘But I don’t want her tried,’ said Winifred.

‘Oh, very well then; I had better go downstairs again and read. The best part was all coming, but if you don’t care, I’m sure *I* don’t!’

‘Little idiot!’ thought Ethelinda angrily, ‘she’ll spoil the whole thing; every heroine has to be tried!’

But Winnie gave in, as she usually did, to Archie. ‘Well, then, she shall be tried if you really think she ought to be, Archie; it won’t hurt her though, will it?’

‘Of course it won’t; it’s all right. Now for the trial: here’s the court, and here’s a place for the judge’ (he built it all up with books and bricks as he spoke); ‘here’s the dock—stick Lady What’s-her-name inside—that’s it. We must do without a jury, but I suppose we *ought* to have a judge; oh, this fellow will do for judge!’

And he seized the jester and raised him to the Bench at once. The jester was more puzzled than ever. ‘Now I’m a *judge*,’ he thought, ‘I shall have to try her; but I’m glad of it—I’ll let her off!’

But unluckily he very soon found that he had no voice at all in the matter, except what Archie chose to lend him.

‘Oh, but Archie,’ said Winifred, who was determined to defeat the ends of justice if she possibly could, ‘can a jester be a judge?’

‘Why not?’ said Archie; ‘judges make jokes sometimes I’ve heard papa say so, and he’s a barrister, and ought to know.’

‘But this one doesn’t make real jokes!’ persisted Winifred.

‘Who asked him to? Judges are not obliged to make jokes, Winnie. I believe you are trying to get her off, but I’m going to see justice done, I tell you. So now then, Lady Ethelinda, you are charged with high treason and trying to poison Her Most Gracious Majesty, Queen Winifred Gladys Robertson, by putting arsenic in Her Majesty’s tea. Guilty or not guilty! Speak up!’

‘Not guilty!’ put in Winifred quickly, thinking that would settle the whole trial comfortably. ‘There, Archie, you can’t say she didn’t speak that time!’

‘Now, you have done it!’ Archie said triumphantly. ‘If she’d confessed, we might have shown mercy. Now we shall have to prove it, and if we do, I’m sorry for her, that’s all!’

‘If she says “Guilty, and she won’t do it again!” ’ suggested Winifred.

‘It’s too late for that now,’ said Archie, who was not going to have his trial cut short in that way: ‘no, we must prove it.’

‘But how are you going to prove it?’

‘You wait. I’ve been in court once or twice with papa, and seen him prove all sorts of things. First, we must have in the fellow who sold the poison—the apothecary, you know. Oh, I say, though, I forgot that—he’s the judge; that won’t do I’

‘Then you can’t prove it after all—I’m so glad!’ cried the Queen, with her eyes sparkling.

‘One would think you rather liked being poisoned,’ said Archie, in an offended tone.

‘I like magnesia, and it isn’t poison, really—it’s medicine.’

‘It isn’t magnesia now; it’s arsenic; and she shan’t get off like this. I’ll call the apothecary’s young man, he’ll prove it (this brick is the apothecary’s young man). There, he says it’s all right; she did it right enough. Now for the sentence! (put a penwiper on the judge’s head, will you, Winnie; it’s solemner).’

‘What’s a sentence?’ asked Winifred, much disturbed at these ill-omened arrangements.

‘You’ll see; this is the judge talking now: “Lady Ethelinda, you’ve been found guilty of very bad conduct; you’ve put arsenic in your beloved Queen’s tea!” ’

‘Why, I haven’t had tea yet!’ protested the Sovereign.

Her Majesty is respectfully ordered not to interrupt the judge when he’s summing up; it puts him out. Well, as I was saying, Lady Ethelinda, I’m sorry to tell you that we shall have to cut your head off!” ’

‘What have I done?’ thought the jester; ‘she’ll think I’m in earnest; she’ll never forgive me!’

But Ethelinda was perfectly delighted, for not one of her heroines had ever been in such a romantic position as this. ‘And of course,’ she thought, ‘it will all come right in the end; it always does.’

Winifred, however, was terrified by the sternness of the court: ‘Archie,’ she cried, ‘she mustn’t have her head cut off.’

‘It will be all right, Winnie, if you will only leave it to me and not interfere. You promised not to interrupt, and yet you will keep on doing it!’

Archie’s head was full of executions just then, for he had been reading ‘The Tower of London;’ he had been artfully leading up to an execution from the very first, and he meant to have his own way.

But first he amused himself by working upon Winifred’s feelings, which was a bad habit of his on these occasions. To do him justice, he did not know how keenly she felt things, and how soon she forgot it was only pretence; it flattered him to see how easily he could make Winifred cry about nothing, and he never guessed what real pain he was giving her.

‘Winnie,’ he began very dolefully, ‘she’s in prison now, languishing in her prison cell, and do you know, I rather think her heart’s beginning to soften a little: she wants you to come and see her. You won’t refuse her last request, Winnie, will you?’

‘As if I could!’ cried Winifred, full of the tenderest compassion.

‘Very well then; this is the last meeting. “My dear kind mistress” (it’s Ethelinda speaking to you now), “that I once loved so dearly in the happy days when I was innocent and good, I couldn’t die till I had asked you to forgive me. Let your poor wicked maid-of-honour kiss your hand just once more as she used to do; tell her you forgive her about that arsenic.” Now then, Winnie!’

‘I—I *can’t*, Archie!’ sobbed Winifred, quite melted by this pathetic appeal.

‘If you don’t, she’ll think you’re angry still, and won’t forgive her,’ said Archie. ‘Just you listen; this is her now: “Won’t you say one little word, Your Majesty; you might as well. When I’m gone and mouldering away in my felon’s grave it will be too late then, and you’ll be sorry. It’s the last thing I shall ever ask you!”’

‘Oh, Ethelinda, darling, don’t!’ implored her Queen; ‘don’t go on talking in that dreadful way; I can’t bear it. Archie, I must forgive her now!’

‘Oh yes, forgive her,’ he said with approval; queens shouldn’t sulk or bear malice.’

‘It’s all right,’ said Winifred briskly, as she dried her eyes; ‘she’s quite good again. Now let’s play at something not quite so horrid!’

‘When we’ve done with this, we will; but it isn’t half over yet; there’s all the execution to come. It’s the fatal day now, the dismal scaffold is erected’ (here he made a rough platform and a neat little block with the books), ‘the sheriff is mounting guard over it (and Archie propped up the unfortunate jester against a workbox so that he overlooked the scaffold); ‘the trembling criminal is brought out amidst the groans of the populace (groan, Winnie, can’t you?)’

‘I shan’t groan,’ said Winnie, rebelliously; ‘I’m a queen, not a populace. Archie, you won’t really cut off her head, will you?’

‘Don’t be a little duffer,’ said he; ‘the end is to be a surprise, so I can’t tell you what it is till it comes. You’ve heard of pardons arriving just in time, haven’t you? Very well then. Only I don’t say one will arrive here, you know, I only say, wait!’

‘And now,’ he went on, ‘I’m not the King any longer, I’m the headsman; and—and I say, Winnie, perhaps you’d better hide your face now; a queen wouldn’t look on at the execution, really; at least a *nice* queen wouldn’t!’

So Winifred hid her face in her hands obediently, very glad to be spared even the pretence of an execution, and earnestly wishing Archie was near the end of this uncomfortable game.

But Archie was just beginning to enjoy himself: ‘The wretched woman,’ he announced with immense unction, ‘is led tottering to the block, and then the headsman, very respectfully, cuts off some of her beautiful golden hair, so that it shouldn’t get in his way.’

At this point I am sorry to say that Archie, in the wish to have everything as real as possible, actually did snip off a good part of Ethelinda’s flossy curls. Luckily for him, his cousin was too conscientious and unsuspecting to peep through her fingers, and never imagined that the scissors she heard were really cutting anything—she even kept her eyes shut while Archie hunted about the room for something, which he found out at last, and which was a sword in a red tin scabbard.

Till then Archie was not quite sure what he really meant to do; at first he had fancied that it would be enough for him just to touch Ethelinda lightly with the sword, but now (whether the idea had been put in his head by the Sausage Glutton, or whether it had been there somewhere all the time) he began to think how easily the sharp blade would cleave Ethelinda’s soft wax neck, and how he could hold up the severed head by the hair, just like the executioner in the pictures, and say solemnly, ‘This is the head of a traitress!’

He knew of course that it would get him into terrible trouble, and he ought to have known that it would be mean and cowardly of him to take advantage of his poor little cousin’s trust in him to deceive her.

But he did not stop to think of that; the temptation was too strong for him; he had gone so far in cutting off her hair that he might just as well cut off her head too.

So that presently Ethelinda found herself lying helpless, with her hands tied behind her, and her close-cropped head placed on a thick book, while Archie stood over her with a cruel gleam in his eyes, and flourished a flashing sword.

‘I ought to be masked though,’ he said suddenly, ‘or I might be recognised—executioners had to be masked. I’ll tie a handkerchief over my eyes and that will have to do.’

And when he had done this, he began to measure the distance with his eye, and to make some trial cuts to be quite sure of his aim, for he meant to get the utmost possible enjoyment out of it.

Ethelinda began to be terribly frightened. Being a heroine was not nearly so pleasant as she had expected. It had cost her most of her beautiful hair already: was it going to cost her her head as well?

Too late, she began to see how foolish she had been, and that even make-believe tea-parties were better than this. She longed to be held safe in tenderhearted little Winifred’s arms.

But Winifred’s eyes were shut tight, and would not be opened till—till all was over. Ethelinda could not move, could not cry out to her, she was quite helpless, and all the time the wicked old man on the clock went on steadily swallowing sausage after sausage, as if he had nothing at all to do with it!

The jester was even more alarmed for Ethelinda than she was herself; he was quite certain that Winifred was being wickedly deceived, and that the pardon so cunningly suggested would never come.

In another minute this dainty little lady, with the sweet blue eyes and disdainful smile, would be gone from him for ever; and there was no hope for her,—none!

And the bitterest thing about it was, that, although he was a great deal confused, as he very well might be, as to how it had all come about, he knew that in some way, he himself had taken part (or rather several parts) in bringing her to this shameful end, and the poor jester, innocent as he was, fancied that her big eyes had a calm scorn and reproach in them as she looked up at him sideways from the block.

‘What shall I do without her?’ he thought; ‘how can I bear it. Ah, I ought to be lying there—not she. I wish I could take her place!’

All this time Archie had been lingering—he lingered so long that Winifred lost all patience. ‘Do make haste, Archie,’ she said, with a little shudder that shook the table. ‘I can’t bear it much longer; I shall *have* to open my eyes!’

‘It was only the mask got in my way,’ he said. ‘Now I’m ready. One, two, three!’

And then there was a whistling swishing sound, followed by a heavy thud, and a flop.

After that Archie very prudently made for the door. ‘I—I couldn’t help it, really, Winnie,’ he stammered, as she put her hands down with relief and looked about, rather dazzled at first by the sudden light. ‘I’ll save up and buy you another twice as pretty. And you know you said Ethelinda didn’t seem to care about you!’

‘Stop, Archie, what do you mean? Did you think you’d cut her head off really!’

‘Haven’t I?’ said Archie, stupidly. ‘I cut *something*’s head off; I saw it go!’

‘Then you did mean it! And, oh, it’s the jester! I wouldn’t have minded it so much, if you hadn’t meant it for Ethelinda! And, Archie, you cruel, bad boy—you’ve cut—cut all her beautiful hair off, and I sat here and let you! She’s not pretty at all now—it’s a shame, it *is* a shame!’

Ethelinda had had a wonderful escape, and this is how it had happened:

The jester had been so anxious about Ethelinda that he had forgotten all about the fairy, and how she had granted him his very next wish; but she, being a fairy, had to remember it. If he had only thought of it, it would have been just as easy to wish Ethelinda safe without any harm coming to himself, but he had wished ‘to take her place,’ and the fairy, whether she liked it or not, was obliged to keep her promise.

So the little shake which Winifred had given the table was enough to make Ethelinda roll quietly over the edge of the platform, and the jester, who never was very firm on his legs, fall forward on his face the next moment, exactly where she had lain—and either the fairy or the handkerchief over his face prevented Archie from finding out the exchange in time.

Archie tried to defend himself: ‘I think she looks better with her hair cut short,’ he said; ‘lots of girls wear it like that And, don’t you see, Winnie, this has been a plot got up by the jester; Ethelinda was innocent all the time, and he’s just nicely caught in his own trap. . . . That—that’s the *surprise!*’

‘I don’t believe you one bit!’ said Winifred. ‘You had no business to cut even my jester’s head off, but you meant to do much worse! I won’t play with you any more, and I shan’t forgive you till the very day you go back to school!’

‘But, Winnie,’ protested Archie, looking rather sheepish and ashamed of himself.

‘Go away directly,’ said Winnie, stamping her foot; ‘I don’t want to listen; leave me alone!’

So Archie went, not sorry, now, that an accident had kept him from doing his worst, and feeling tolerably certain that he would be able to make his cousin relent long before the time she had fixed, while Winifred, left to herself again, was so absorbed in sobbing over Ethelinda’s sad disfigurement, that she quite forgot to pick up the split halves of the jester’s head which were lying on the nursery floor.

\* \* \*

That night Ethelinda had the chest of drawers all to herself, and the old Sausage Glutton grinned savagely at her from the mantelpiece, for he was disappointed at the way in which his plans had turned out.

‘Good evening,’ he began, with one of his nastiest sneers. ‘And how are you after your little romance, eh? Master Archie very nearly had your pretty little empty head off—but of course I couldn’t allow that. I hope you enjoyed yourself?’

‘I did at first,’ said Ethelinda; ‘I got frightened afterwards, when I thought it wasn’t going to end at all nicely. But did you notice how very wickedly that dreadful jester behaved to me—it will be a warning to me against associating with such persons in future, and I assure you that there was something about him that made me shudder from the very first! I have heard terrible things about the dolls in the Lowther Arcade, and what can you expect at such prices? Well, he’s rewarded for his crimes, and that’s a comfort to think of—but it has all upset me very much indeed, and I don’t want any more romance—it does shorten the hair so!’

The Dutch fairy doll heard her and was very angry, for she knew of course why the jester had come to a tragic ending.

‘Shall I tell her now, and make her ashamed and sorry—would she believe me? would she care? Perhaps not, but I must speak out some time—only I had better wait till the clock has stopped. I can’t bear her to talk about that poor jester in this way.’

But it really did not matter to the jester, who could hear or feel nothing any more—for they had thrown him into the dustbin, where, unless the dust-cart has called since, he is lying still.